



File Code: 1950

Date: May 15, 2015

Re: 2015-2016 Proposed Projects on the Darrington District

Dear Forest User:

The Forest Service (USFS) and partners are analyzing a number of new projects on the Darrington Ranger District, as well as continuing work on on-going projects. While budgets continue to be flat, planning and implementation of new projects is scheduled to occur during the late summer and fall of 2015 and into 2016. The Forest Service is scoping for issues that the projects' environmental analyses should address. Please provide comments on issues and scope of analysis by June 20, 2015 for the new projects below:

Special Use Permit Projects:

1. **USGS Glacier Peak Seismic Stations**– This project would issue a 20-year permit for USGS to install and maintain four seismic monitoring stations around Glacier Peak. While two stations could possibly be collocated with existing administrative structures (Miner's Ridge Lookout and/or the Lost Creek Ridge radio repeater station), at least two sites would be stand-alone stations. These stations would include electronic monitoring equipment, antenna, batteries and solar panels mounted to the equipment enclosure or lookout. Access to the sites would use existing trails where possible, with helicopter use projected for remote sites to transport heavy equipment, supplies and personnel. All project sites are located in Glacier Peak Wilderness in T30N, R14E, Sections 24 and 29, and T30N, R12E, Section 5 and T31N, R15E, Section 5.
2. **North Mountain Lookout Restoration** – This project would provide a special use permit for *Friends of North Mountain Lookout* to repair and maintain the existing North Mountain Lookout in accord with the standards for structures eligible for the National Historic Register. The project is located in T33N R09E, Section 26, SE1/4, on North Mountain, accessed by road 2810, 4.5 miles north of Darrington.
3. **Three Fingers Lookout Maintenance** - This project would provide for roof repair and other maintenance activities by the *Everett Mountaineers* on the existing Three Fingers Lookout in accord with the standards for structures eligible for the National Historic Register and following the Secretary of the Interiors Standards for Rehabilitation. The project is located in T31N R09E, Section 26, SE 1/4, on Three Fingers Mountain, accessed by road 41, and trail 641, approximately 7 linear miles southwest of Darrington.

Vegetation Management Project:

4. **Mountain Loop Vegetation and Road Management** - This project is proposed by the Darrington Area Resource Association (DARA) for vegetation management along the Mt. Loop Highway in the upper Sauk River drainage with potential for contracting as a stewardship project. Vegetation management would include pocket openings (approximately 2 acres) for scenic vistas, thinning of forest stands (approximately 27 acres) along the Mt. Loop for forest stand enhancement and road "Day lighting" (approximately 35 acres). "Day lighting" is described as removal of trees from along the road ditch line so as to remove tree canopy extending over a road that is contributing to branches in ditch lines and shading of roads that contribute to wet conditions, potholes, blocked culverts and sediment runoff. Associated work with daylighting is heavy road maintenance consisting of upgrade of roads surfacing and culverts. This project is located along Road 20 in T31N R11E, Sections 19, 29, 30 and 32, and T30N R11E, Sections 4, 5 and 9.



Trail Project:

5. **Bull Bear Trail** – This project would construct approximately 5.75 miles of new trail between Rat Trap Pass and Skaar Pass (off of FSR 27) for trail access to the Circle Peak/Crystal Lake area. The new trail, with grade suitable for stock and mtn. bikes, would partially replace existing trails that are expensive and difficult to maintain to desired standards and recreational experience. The project area is located outside of wilderness in T31N R11E Sections 2 and 3 and in T32N R11E Sections 33, 34, and 35 on the Darrington Ranger District, WA.

The following section of this letter lists the purpose and need for each of the proposed actions, a brief project description, with the name and phone number of the project leader or USFS liaison. Maps of the projects (Figure 1 to Figure 4) with the location of the proposed actions are attached.

1. USGS Glacier Peak Monitoring Stations - Eric Ozog, District Liaison, 360-691-4396, Figure 4

Purpose and Need: Glacier Peak is a potentially active volcano in close proximity to popular recreation areas as well as upstream from the communities of Darrington, Arlington, and various Puget Sound metropolitan areas. As a potentially active volcano, Glacier Peak poses significant mudflow, ash fall, landslide, flood, and earthquake hazards to nearby communities and community assets. With only one seismometer currently operating, there is a need for more robust seismic monitoring of Glacier Peak for the purpose of detection and accurate location of small magnitude earthquakes and other seismic signals which are used to determine if a volcano is reawakening while magma is still several miles below the surface in order to give adequate warning to hikers and others in the area and the adjacent communities down valley.

There is also need to respond to the USGS request for a special use permit as per Forest Plan direction for land uses. "The Forest Plan directs the FS to be responsive in the consideration of the use and occupancy of the Forest by private individuals, Federal, State, and local governments when such use is consistent with Forest management objectives, is in the public interest, and cannot be reasonably served by development on private land" (4-137). Special use evaluation, permit issuance, fees, and administration will be in accordance with FS Manual 2700, as revised and 36 CFR 251."

Proposed Action: As part of its mandate to mitigate volcanic hazards, the USGS Cascades Volcano Observatory proposes to install four seismic monitoring stations around Glacier Peak, within the Glacier Peak Wilderness (final site location may shift slightly with field review). The USFS would issue a special use permit to USGS to construct, operate and maintain the equipment on NFS lands. The equipment would consist of four co-located seismic and GPS stations. Each station would include a seismometer and 10 sealed batteries inside a small fiberglass enclosure, solar panels mounted on the enclosure, a GPS antenna and mast mounted in bedrock, and data telemetry antenna mounted on the enclosure wall. A helicopter would be needed to deliver external sling loads of heavy equipment, tools and materials, and installation crews, to and from each site during construction. The USGS anticipates needing up to 5 helicopter trips to install each seismic monitoring station: 2 trips to deliver sling loads of material, 1 trip to back haul tools, supplies and garbage, and 2 trips to transport and retrieve 2-4 crews of three persons each. Crews would camp overnight at the sites. Installation is expected to take 3 days per site over a 2-3 week period, depending on inclement weather. For long-term maintenance of the sites, personnel would hike in to perform routine preventative maintenance. A helicopter may be required once every few years when transport of bulky, heavy gear over difficult terrain by foot is impractical (i.e., replacement of batteries or failing equipment) or not safe. Construction is tentatively scheduled in late August to early September of 2016.

NEPA Document: Decision Memo 36 CFR 220.6 (e)(3)

Decision Date: July, 2015

2. North Mountain Lookout – Stella Torres, District Liaison, 360-436-2316, Figure 1

Purpose and Need: The use of North Mountain Lookout for communications equipment and as a fire lookout has been shifted to other sites and programs. All communications relay equipment was removed from the lookout, which presents an opportunity to utilize the lookout as a public recreation attraction. The structure which currently has a leaky roof has been evaluated for historic significance and found to have potential for listing as a historic structure. There is a need to determine future use of the structure consistent with the Forest Land Management Plan, the National Historic Management Act and the Forest recreation spectrum. There is also a need for the USFS to respond to the request for appropriate permits to pursue the proposed work at this site.

Proposed Action: A local organization, *Friends of North Mountain Lookout* proposes to restore the lookout for operations as a future rental cabin for the public. This organization has submitted a work plan for initial work to replace the existing roof with in-kind materials so as stabilize the structure and is developing a business plan for future operations. Without roof repairs, water damage to the facility is an increasing threat. Additional long-term work proposed at the North Mountain Lookout includes restoration of the cabin, stairs, and associated support structures such as clearing vegetation near the guy wires and to maintain openings in the trees around the lookout for scenic views. The USFS would issue a special use permit as per Forest Plan direction for land uses.

NEPA Document: Categorical Exclusion (for repairs) 36 CFR 220. 6 (d)(3) Decision Date: June, 2015
Decision Memo (for special uses) 36 CFR 220.6 (e)(3) Decision Date: Jan., 2016

3. Three Fingers Lookout – Stella Torres - District Liaison, 360-436-2316, Figure 2

Purpose and Need: There is a need to maintain the Lookout structure consistent with the Forest Land Management Plan and the National Historic Management Act. There is a need for maintenance to be conducted in a safe manner.

Proposed Action: A local organization, *Everett Mountaineers*, has a permit for maintaining the Lookout and has identified the need to replace the roof to maintain structural integrity of the Lookout. This maintenance would involve the transport of up to 600 pounds of shingles and 200 pound of miscellaneous materials in a safe manner. Due to the remote location over steep snow fields, a helicopter training flight by Snohomish County Search and Rescue is proposed for transport of materials to the Lookout site via an external (sling) load. There would be no need to land the helicopter. Old shingles and repair materials would be stockpiled on site for retrieval by one helicopter flight (or removal over time by visitors and maintenance volunteers by ground). The USFS would complete a minimum tool analysis for the proposed maintenance work within the terms and agreement of the existing permit with the *Everett Mountaineers* for operations on NFS lands.

NEPA Document: Categorical Exclusion (for repairs) 36 CFR 220. 6 (d)(3) Decision Date: July, 2015

4. Mountain Loop Vegetation and Road Management - Peter Forbes, District Liaison, 360-436-2301 Figure 3

Purpose and Need: There is a need to maintain vegetation along road systems to standards provided in the Forest Land Management Plan. There is also a need for road systems to meet appropriate road maintenance standards consistent with Aquatic Conservation Objectives.

Proposed Action: A local organization, Darrington Area Resource Advocates (DARA), proposes a vegetation management project that would include pocket openings (2 acres) for scenic vistas, thinning of forest stands along the Mt. Loop (27 acres) for stand growth and biodiversity, and road “Day lighting” for road and ditch line maintenance. The project goals are to implement a project which promotes forest stand structure and species diversity while generating sufficient revenue (retained receipts) to contribute to the maintenance of the road and viewpoints. “Day lighting” is described as removal of trees from approximately 30 feet of the road ditch line (on either side of the road) so as to remove tree canopy extending over a road that is contributing to branches in ditch lines and shading of roads that contribute to

wet conditions, potholes, blocked culverts and sediment runoff. The proposed project has the potential for stewardship contracting. The initial road system proposed for treatment is approximately 7 miles of Road 20 (Mountain Loop Highway (MLH) from MP 44.7 to MP 37.3, ending at the entrance to the Bedal Campground). Additional candidate roads for daylighting include: Road 2060 (Clear Creek from MP 0.0 to 8-mile trailhead), Road 23 (White Chuck River road from MP 0.0 to the Junction with Road 27), and Road 49 (N.F. Sauk Road from MP 0.0 to Bald Eagle Trailhead). Associated work with the daylighting is heavy road maintenance consisting of upgrade of roads surfacing and culverts depending on funds generated from the trees removal.

NEPA Document: Categorical Exclusion (harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres: 36 CFR 220.6(e)(12) and repair and maintenance of roads: 36 CFR 220.6 (d)(4) Decision Date: August, 2015

5. Bull Bear Trail Construction –Gary Paull, Project Leader, 360-436-2329, Figure 3

Purpose and Need: There is a need for trail access to the Circle Peak/Crystal Lake area that would accommodate a variety of recreational uses, in a safe and resource sensitive manner. The current trail route to Circle Peak/Crystal Lake uses portions of abandoned or closed forest roads and in the Crystal Creek drainage, a portion of a steep former fire line along a timber harvested unit serves as part of the Crystal Lake trail. The route to Crystal Lake is hard to maintain, is expensive and does not meet the forest trail standards. Forest plan direction calls for “Trails interrupted by logging or road construction will be restored or substitute trails with the same primary objective and difficulty level provided so that the mileage of trails in the same general area is not diminished”. The desired condition is access to the Circle Peak/Crystal Lake area that would reduce long term trail maintenance costs and address safety issues associated with the existing Crystal Lake Trail. Desired recreation users include equestrian and mountain bike users to meet “plan” direction to expand opportunities for underserved and growing recreational uses such as mountain biking.

Proposed Action: Construct approximately 5.75 miles of new trail from Rat Trap Pass to Skaar Pass to connect with the Circle Peak Trail at Skaar Pass. As proposed, the trail would be developed as a Class 3 Trail with design standards for pack and saddle stock and managed for use by both stock and hikers and available for mountain bike. The project would include excavation and clearing of brush, stumps, rocks and debris to create a nominal 30” wide trail tread. Tread width may be widened on steep sideslopes to accommodate pack animals. Trail grade would average under 10% with maximum constructed grades not to exceed 15%. Rock and stump blasting would be needed to create the trail tread. No bridges are anticipated, though some punchon may be needed for wet areas. A helicopter would be used to supply camps and bring in materials for the project. The project would include a trailhead constructed on Road 27 near Rat Trap Pass. This project would complete phase 2 of 3 toward desired long term access to the Meadow Mountain Trail, and would allow for abandonment of the existing Crystal Lake Trail.

NEPA Document: Decision Memo - trail construction 36 CFR 220.6 (e)(1) Decision Date: January 2016

On-going Projects:

Suiattle Campground and Trailhead Clean-up – contact Adrienne Hall, Project Leader, 360-436-2318

This project continues recreational site clean-up with removal of hazard trees in Buck Creek campground and Downey Creek trailhead and camping area after limited access in the area following flood damage to the main road. Hazard tree salvage includes utilization of down wood in aquatic restoration projects. This project is located along Road 26 in the Suiattle River drainage at approximately MP 14.5, and MP 20 in T32N, R11E, Section 15, and in T32N, R12E, Sections 14 and 24, northeast of Darrington.

Purpose and Need: There is a need for recreational facilities that provide for visitor safety, and provide capacity for recreation visitors within the Suiattle River drainage of the Darrington District. In October of 2014, Buck Creek and Sulphur Creek campgrounds and the Downey Creek trailhead were assessed for hazard trees, by Forest recreation staff and a Regional Forest Pathologist. The assessment used the 2014 *Guide for Hazard-Tree Identification and Mitigation on Developed Sites in Oregon and Washington*

Forests. R6-NR-TP-021-2013. USDA Forest Service, Forest Health Protection, Pacific Northwest Region, Portland, OR.

On-going Action: This project continues recreation facility, site operation and maintenance in the Suiattle river drainage that includes road and site maintenance, hazard tree removal, revegetation where necessary, and general cleanup and repair or replacement of campground elements (tables, stoves, toilets, signs, etc.). The 2015 work focuses specifically on hazard tree removal at Buck Creek campground, and Downey Creek trailhead and camping area. The District is pursuing a three phase strategy for treating the hazard trees in the Suiattle:

1. Reduce tree hazards in order to open a portion of campgrounds and trailheads in 2015. Close a portion of the Buck Creek campgrounds to limit risk from upslope hazard trees laminated root rot.
2. Initiate planning for vegetation management in sites with heavy laminated root rot.
3. Develop options for maintaining camping sites in the Suiattle with fewer existing hazard trees.

Darrington District Road Maintenance – contact Santino Pascua, Roads Manager, 425-888-8784

Maintenance activities include brushing, surface blading, slide removal, culvert cleaning, addition of needed ditch relief culverts, ditch cleaning, fill stabilization, pavement patching, cutting out of downed trees, hazard tree removal, gate and bridge maintenance and road closure, shoulder maintenance, and spot rocking. Culverts which have exceeded their useful lives and/or are of concern for bedload transport, 100-yr flows, or fish passage, will be considered for replacement. Exact locations will be determined as other work occurs. The extent of road work is limited by the amount of road maintenance funding provided in any one year.

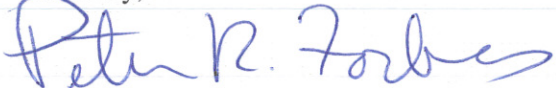
Darrington District Trail Maintenance – contact Bridget Wisniewski, Trails program, 360-436-2339

Trails are also being checked as snow melts for damage from winter conditions. Trail maintenance and repair would occur on trails, especially heavy-use trails, and continued on-going improvement projects. Trail maintenance would include the log removal, brushing and drainage work such as the improvement of the Suiattle River Trail, replacement of footings and decking on the Ice Cave Boardwalk, improvement of the stream crossing on the Mt. Pilchuck Lookout Trail and additional work on the Pacific Crest Trail and other District trails.

A number of the proposed and on-going actions fall within categories that may exclude them from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. Those projects currently have no identified extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed actions and they are within categories listed in 36 CFR 220.6 (d) and (e). The decisions for projects fitting within CFR categorical exclusions would have a categorical exclusion letter signed by the District Ranger as the Responsible Official, or be documented in Decision Memos, also signed by the District Ranger.

If you have comments on these proposed actions, please submit them to Phyllis Reed by June 20, 2015 at the above address, phone 360-436-2332, email: plreed@fs.fed.us. Comments received in response to this invitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the Project Record and available for public review. We appreciate your continued interest in the management of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

Sincerely,



PETER R FORBES
District Ranger

